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AUTHOR Heinold, Henry Robert
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ABSTRACT

Sentence combining activities can be used throughout the English curriculum. The entire composing process can be developed with sentence combining activities based on student rough drafts of book reports, analysis and imitation of sentences written by professional writers, the organization of sentences in whole paragraphs or essays, and "oral proofreading." A unit in oral interpretation already integrates literature, reading, listening, and speaking; it can phase in composition if the students use sentence combining activities to write their interpretations before performing. Sentence combining can also be used in oral interpretation lessons to help students eliminate their pauses at the ends of lines of text (as in poetry). Rewriting sentences can be used as a check on reading comprehension, adding variety to reading exercises. The combining exercises themselves also give students experience in using grammar properly. Using these suggestions, English teachers can take advantage of the structure, the effects, and the questions brought about by sentence combining. (Examples are offered of specific combining activities in the four areas discussed, and of sources for developing combining exercises.) (RL)

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SENTENCES:
THE FOCAL POINTS OF ENGLISH TEACHING
(Suggestions for Integrating Sentence Combining with Other Strands of the English Curriculum)

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By
Henry Robert Heinold
Mildred E. Strang Middle School
Yorktown Central School District
2701 Crompond Road
Yorktown Heights, New York 10598

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Henry Robert Heinold
Mildred E. Strang Middle School
Yorktown Heights, New York 10598
Phone: 914-245-6020

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Most English teachers know about the positive effects of sentence combining exercises on the growth of student writing. However, most English teachers are responsible for teaching more than grammar and composition, and an intensive combining program would take time from the other strands of the curriculum. This is also true of other strands, for too much discussion takes time from literature or too much literature takes time from usage skills. This threat to a balanced or mandated curriculum is off-set by an important planning principle: making lessons do at least double duty so that more than one strand is taught in a single lesson.

If one assumes that the sentence is the basic unit of language and if one compares the strands to light beams, then work with sentences becomes the focal point of a curriculum. English teachers can integrate sentence combining with the other strands. What follows is a set of suggestions for integrating sentence combining with the whole English curriculum.

-The Whole Composition Program-

English teachers can do more than exploit syntactical growth through combining if they view combining as part of the process of writing. The process of writing, as well as teaching and learning, is a creative one. Creativity is a tension between inspiration and drudgery. Over time, a classroom should vibrate with the same tension, discussions and journals being part of a program along with research cards and spelling.

Explicitly connecting what is learned in combining exercises to work on rough drafts tightens the integration of language skills and composition. Applying the combining skills to rough drafts is important, because the skill is applied to the students' own languages or dialects. Also,

basing work on rough drafts encourages a "Why-don't-you-try-this?" attitude, which is more positive than the "Why-didn't-you-remember-that?" attitude, resulting from evaluating final drafts.

This explicit connection could mean the use of rewriting checklist questions like the following:

1) Have I circled the AND's, SO's, and THEN's to see if they can be replaced?
2) Can I make my point in fewer words by using an appositive?
3) Have I made the order of events clear by using adverb conjunctions like AFTER, BEFORE, WHEN, AS?

Using a chalkboard or an overhead, teachers can use examples from rough drafts by students for combining exercises. As a class exercise, with many versions being accepted, students working on book reports could combine "kernels" like the following:

The title of my book is Sounder.
The author is William H. Armstrong.
It has 116 pages.
The publisher is Harper & Row.
The general topic is the experiences of a poor black family.

After the class or group exercise, students could work on their rough drafts to eliminate monotonous "kernels." Older or advanced students might discuss the phrasing of the topic. It should be noted that by working on rough drafts of book reports, literature and also library skills are covered.

Good examples from rough drafts or early drafts can provide both exercise and praise, as in the following:

MAIN: Sir Henry is warned not to go out on the moor at night.

ADD: The moor is dreadful.
X X X ("X" means delete.)

ADD: The moor is dreary.
X X X

ADD: That is SOMETIME. (+,BECAUSE)

ADD: The evil hound is supposed to be out there. (+WHEN)

RESULT SENTENCE: Sir Henry is warned not to go out on the dreadful and dreary moor at night, because that is when the evil hound is supposed to be out there.

Both of the examples for combining are from book reports by students in the same eighth grade class. The range of abilities is not a liability, because students who have difficulty with the literary dialect learn from those who have less difficulty, while those who have some mastery of complex sentences learn the value of simpler structures. Students are introduced, if individual book reports are being done, to a wide range of literature; Sounder, The Hound of the Baskervilles, Taking Sides, Sleeping Murder giving an idea of the range of abilities and interests.

In Teaching for Thinking: Theory and Application by Louis E. Raths, Selma Wasserman, Arthur Jonas, and Arnold Rothstein (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1967) a way of reading compositions is set forth that helps students clarify and expand their thinking (pp. 19-22). Sentences in the compositions are marked or coded for various thinking patterns, "all-or-none" thinking, "value statements," or "attribution" being three of the patterns. This critical thinking or semantic consideration could also be part of combination or rewriting exercises that use rough drafts by students.

For example, in a student report about Why We Can't Wait by Martin Luther King, Jr., the following assertion,

which was not supported, was made, and this became a combination and a discussion topic:

MAIN: He was a person.
ADD: The person was magnificent.
X X X
MAIN: He was a speaker. (+AND)
ADD: The speaker was great.
X X X
MAIN: He couldn't write. (+,BUT)
RESULT SENTENCE: He was a magnificent person and a great person, but he couldn't write.

Discussion revealed that the student had objections to King's vocabulary, an objection she later supported with citations. Added to the need for citation could be a consideration of the rhetorical values of the vocabulary and a consideration of the differences between King's oratory and his writing. Also, for teachers in a team situation, this shows how combining can be co-ordinated with other subjects.

In still another report, the value or issue of verisimilitude was dicussed on the basis of the following exercise:

MAIN: Taking Sides is good for teenagers.
ADD: It is so real (+BECAUSE)
ADD: It is so life-like. (+AND)
X X X
RESULT SENTENCE: Taking Sides is good for teenagers because it is so real and life-like.

Naturally, the discussion also concerned the issue of what is "good" for teenagers.

Using examples from rough drafts as the bases for combining exercises allows teachers to connect the lessons to composition in an explicit way. Furthermore, other strands, namely literature and discussion, can also be integrated into the same lessons.

Professional writers read. It is said that writers learn more from each other than they do from life. This venerable way of learning to write can be exploited with sentence combining simply by using exercises based upon sentences by professional writers. The use of these sentences lends credibility to the lesson; it is similar to a young basketball player using films of a professional to learn certain skills, which, of course, must be practiced. The use of these sentences allows teachers to discuss a book or author while the exercise proceeds. Finally, the use of these sentences can serve as starters for the students' own compositions or journal entries.

Students could write a description of the movements of animals. The students would try to make their descriptions as vivid as possible, with help from word choice and syntax. To start the writing process, a sentence by John Godey (The Snake in Readers' Digest Condensed Books, p. 502) might be used:

MAIN: The snake crept swiftly through the darkness.

ADD: Its length was curved into a "S" movement.
X

ADD: Its length was slender.
X X X

ADD: The "S" movement was flowing.
X X X X

ADD: The flowing was continuous.
X X X

RESULT SENTENCE: Its slender length curved into a continuous flowing "S" movement, the snake crept swiftly through the darkness.
(Note: The initial absolute phrase could follow "darkness.")

Students could write a narrative. They could warm up by doing a combination based upon a sentence by Robert Newton

Peck in Fawn, page 23 of the Dell edition:

MAIN: For a while Fawn's father had made him attend school at Fort Carillon.

ADD: He (Fawn) had been the only boy at Fort
X R R
Carillon with no hair. (R:WHERE)
("R" means replace.)

RESULT SENTENCE: For a while Fawn's father had made him attend school at Fort Carillon, where he had been the only boy with no hair.

The topic of this narrative would be times when students felt embarrassed because of dress or appearance.

Argument or exposition could be started through combining. Students could read pet stories, discuss pets, or write about pets in their journals; all of this would no doubt produce positive images. Then, the mean teacher would have work done on the following combination, which would produce a negative image:

MAIN: Dogs have been harassing game on prison land.

MAIN: Prison Superintendent Theodore Reid appealed to dog owners to keep their dogs away from the Matteawan Prison tract. (+;THEREFORE,)

RESULT SENTENCE: Dogs have been harassing game on prison land; therefore, Prison Superintendent Theodore Reid appealed to dog owners to keep their dogs away from the Matteawan Prison tract.

(Sentance based on one by Myron Albert, Evening News, Dutchess Edition, January 2, 1980, p. 1A.)

After discussion, students would write a composition (with research) or debate the following proposition: Except for health or police reasons, dogs should be banned from cities. This could also be the basis of a science fiction story.

One combination exercise can be longer than one sentence. An exercise can make up a single paragraph or an essay of several paragraphs. Longer combination exercises can be done in a variety of ways to take advantage of student strengths and to integrate combining with other strands. For a multi-paragraph exercise, one student does not have to do the whole exercise. Task groups can be assigned to different paragraphs, allowing teachers to evaluate group dynamic skills of students. Students could help each other with proofreading by checking each other's work for punctuation and spelling.

Very often, the longer exercises found in texts or composed by teachers themselves raise questions. As the students raise and answer questions, they learn to develop their writing with detail or with significant issues. For example, current events and the techniques of writing biography could be explored by using Sanford J. Ungar's "Alexander Haig: Pragmatist at State" (The Atlantic Monthly, March 1981, pp. 15-16). This article could be the basis of a multi-paragraph exercise, but only one paragraph will be used here to show the example:

MAIN: Some commentators portrayed Haig SOMEHOW.

ADD: Haig was portrayed as a kind of agent for the
X X X

restoration of Nixon's respectability.

ADD: The agent is a secret one.
X X X X X

ADD: Reagan chose Haig as his Secretary of State.
(+WHEN)

MAIN: Some see him SOMEHOW.

ADD: He is seen as a stand-in for Kissinger.
X X X

ADD: Kissinger is the former wizard of American
X X

foreign policy.

MAIN: That interpretation misses subleties. (+HOWEVER,)

ADD: The subleties are important.
X X X

RESULT PARAGRAPH: When Reagan chose Haig as his Secretary of State, some commen - tators portrayed him as a kind of secret agent for the restoration of Nixon's respectability. Some see him as a stand-in for Kissinger, the former wizard of American foreign policy. However, that interpretation misses important subleties.

After doing the exercise, the students could list questions to research for a paper. Also, as the year progresses, Secretary Haig could be monitored as a current events project, with students trying to analyze or predict his statements and actions.

When explicitly integrating combining with the whole composing process, one phase should not be overlooked: oral proofreading. Oral proofreading is very effective, and it can be done in a variety of ways to accomodate various kinds of students. Reading the result sentences of combinations aloud helps students master new structures and makes the reading of their own compositions easier. Of course, the lessons about the pause values of the various punctuation marks can be applied to techniques of oral interpretation.

-Oral Interpretation-

A unit in oral interpretation already integrates literature, reading, listening and speaking. It also phases in composition if the students write their interpretations before performing; sentence combining could be added to the lessons as described above. However, combining can also be used to help students to stop pausing at the ends of lines.

In the revised edition of Counterpoint in Literature, edited by Edythe Daniel, Edmund J. Farrell, Alfred E. Grommon, Olive Stafford Niles, and Robert C. Pooley (Glenview, Ill., Scott, Foresman and Company,1976), "First Lesson" by Phyllis McGinley appears on page 97. A possible end-stop problem can be prevented by having students recast the poetry lines as prose, which is a kind of combining:

Men are worriers. It is difficult for them
To learn what they must learn:

Changed to prose form:

Men are worriers. It is difficult for them to learn what they must learn:

Or:

It is difficult for them to learn what they must learn:

Often the comprehension dependent upon understanding ellipsis or punctuation can be helped by having students supply the missing word or words as a kind of combination exercise:

Men are worriers. It is difficult for them
To learn what they must learn:
How you have a journey to take and very likely,
For a while, will not return.

Although awkward, the phrase "which is that" could replace the colon.

Re-arrangement might help students understand the following lines:

Books, angular boys, or swimming in deep water--
Fathers mistrust them all.

Changed to:

Fathers mistrust books, angular boys, or swimming in deep water.

These "combining" exercises are at the plain sense level and would be the beginning of analysis. However, such a simple beginning is often enjoyed by students because it gives them another concrete approach to something that seems very abstract.

The reworking of the lines of poetry represents literature work at the simple recall and translation level. However, combining can be used to work with inference, if teachers so desire. For example, Blake's poem, "The Tiger," can be tested at the inference level with a standard true or false question:

To emphasize the tiger's force, the poet uses the metaphor of the tiger being created by a godlike smithy. TRUE FALSE

The same question can be asked through a sentence combination:

Choose the better ADD sentence for the combination:

MAIN: The poet uses the metaphor of the tiger being created by a godlike smithy.

ADD: The poet would emphasize the tiger's gentle, holy nature. (R:TO)
X X R

or

ADD: The poet would emphasize the tiger's force. (R:TO)
X X R

Comprehension and sentence writing are developed at the same time.

These combining aids to oral interpretation, along with the book reporting and imitation discussed in the composition section, automatically integrate literature into program that involves combining. Moreover, specific reading skill exercises can be mixed with combining to achieve further integration.

-Reading Skills-

Rewriting sentences can be used as a check on reading comprehension, also. This can add variety to reading exercises. For example, a student's comprehension of cause and effect can be checked by rewriting the following exercises from the SRA-RFU Reading Kit, Green Version:

Number 5 from Card 49 Diamond

Iron objects rust and disintegrate when exposed to weather, especially to moist air; therefore, only a few direct evidences exist of primitive man's work in (metals).

Number 6 from Card 49 Diamond

Fear is a hindrance to growth, for growth means change, and fearful men tend to cling to their (present).

After the students have put in the correct words, "metals" and "present," they can rewrite the sentences. The Number 5 sentence could be rewritten with "because," and the Number 6 sentence could be rewritten with "therefore." Number 6 could be enhanced with examples and the relevant transition words used. Both sentences could be rewritten to eliminate sexist language.

Work with the appositive and the contrast conjunctions can be used with lessons on context vocabulary skills:

MAIN: The east trail was treacherous.

ADD: The west trail was safe. (+,BUT)

RESULT SENTENCE: The east trail was trecherous, but the west trail was safe.

Question: What does "treacherous" mean?

MAIN: Dialogue may be used to reveal background information.

ADD: Dialogue is conversation between characters
X X
in fiction and nonfiction.

RESULT: Dialogue, conversation between characters in fiction and nonfiction, may be used to reveal background information.

Question: What is "dialogue"?

Integrating combining with vocabulary demonstrates why teachers should not become too reliant on a combining text and why they should compose their own exercises. Textbooks on combining make syntax the prime concern and

do not involve the students with other complications like vocabulary. Also, by composing their own exercises, teachers can better integrate the combining work with the curriculum and their students' own needs.

Noun clause combinations can be used to have students write summary statements. For example, to use the paragraph about Secretary Haig again, teachers could construct comprehension exercises in the following way:

Choose the correct ADD sentence:

MAIN: Ungar claims SOMETHING.

ADD: Haig will radically change U.S. foreign policy. (+THAT)

or

ADD: Some political analysts hate Haig. (+THAT)

or

ADD: Some political analysts feel that Haig will do the bidding of others. (+THAT)

RESULT SENTENCE: Ungar claims that some political analysts feel that Haig will do the bidding of others.

Finally, just as the passage about Secretary Haig was used to stimulate questions that would lead to a paper about Mr. Haig, the passage can be used to stimulate questions that the students read to answer. The discussion can arouse interest, expressed in the form of questions, which, in turn, guide student reading to increase comprehension. In fact, students could go on to read the whole article by Ungar

-Grammar-

The combining exercises themselves give experience with grammar. Moreover, in a traditional program, MAIN and ADD sentences can be parsed while students write their RESULT sentences on the chalkboard or overhead; the whole class does not wait while two or three students write RESULT sentences.

However, combining sentences encourages the exploration of language. Linguistically, there is really very little known about language, and even so-called mistakes can be used to explore language and its options. It is important for teachers to know a great deal about language, but it is more important that they keep an open mind, especially during combining exercises.

An interesting use of the conjunctive adverb "however" was discussed as a result of student questions about the following exercise:

MAIN: Saturated fat intake raises blood cholesterol levels.

MAIN: It is not itself related to coronary risk.
(+;HOWEVER,)

EXPECTED RESULT: Saturated fat intake raises blood cholesterol levels; however, it is not itself related to coronary risk. (Sentence from New York Times.)

Students asked why "however" couldn't be placed in front of "saturated" When they tried it, it seemed to work by itself and with the word "much" after "however." Other intensive uses of "however," not found in available school grammar books were discussed.

Other exercises, also based sentences from the New York Times, provided interesting RESULTs:

MAIN: SOMETHING is not clear.

ADD: The error in the chromosome is linked with increasing age in women. (+JUST WHY)

EXPECTED RESULT: Just why the error in the chromosome is linked with increasing age in woman is not clear.

DISCUSSED RESULT: The error in the chromosome is linked with increasing age in

women; just why is not clear.

MAIN: Birth defects generally have been blamed on women.

MAIN: Infertility has been blamed on women. (+,)
X X X X X

MAIN: Even the lack of male heirs has been blamed on women (+,AND)
X X X X X X

EXPECTED RESULT: Birth defects, infertility, and even the lack of male heirs generally have been blamed on women.

DISCUSSED RESULT: Birth defects and infertility generally have been blamed on women, even the lack of male heirs!

A good source of combining exercises is children's books. The following was based upon a sentence in Mina Lewiton Simon's Is Anyone Here? (New York: Atheneum Publishers):

MAIN: No one is here except SOME THINGS.

ADD: A digger-wasp is burrowing.
X

ADD: A wolf-spider is hurrying.
X

ADD: A lun-ant is scurrying.
X

ADD: A pine lizard is watchfully staring.
X

EXPECTED RESULT: No one is here except a digger-wasp burrowing, a wolf-spider hurrying, a lun-ant scurrying, a pine lizard watchfully staring.

DISCUSSED RESULT: No one is here except a digger-wasp, a wolf-spider, a lun-ant, and a pine lizard, burrowing, hurrying, scurrying, and

watchfully staring.

Do the predicate verbs stay, in the reader's mind, with their orginal subjects? Why? How? Why not? Some students, like linguists, enjoy arguing over issues like this.

-Conclusion-

If English teachers plan for the integration of strands during single lessons or during a series of lessons, they should be able to teach about the drudge aspects of English while having some inspiring moments. By thinking of sentences as focal points for light beams from many sources, English teachers can take advantage of the structure, the effects, and questions brought about by sentence combining.

the end.